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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KHARTOUM 001422

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SUBJECT: "THIS TIME, THEY'RE SERIOUS?" - SUDAN MAKES UP
WITH MINNAWI AND PLEDGES FULL COOPERATION WITH UNAMID

REF: A. KHARTOUM 1417

[1](#)B. KHARTOUM 1406

[1](#)C. KHARTOUM 1391

[1](#)D. KHARTOUM 1371

Classified By: CDA Alberto M. Fernandez, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: On the eve of his departure for UNGA, Sudanese VP Ali Osman Taha hammered out a reconciliation with disgruntled Darfur rebel leader Minni Minnawi, promising full compliance of the semi-moribund 2006 Darfur Peace Agreement and an end to recent fighting and bombing in Darfur. Taha also personally pledged full cooperation with UNAMID in his seven hour visit to El Fasher which revealed as much about Sudanese internal political dynamics and the regime's concerns about a possible ICC indictment of Sudan's President. Taha was advised that Sudan should not push for its surrogates to precipitously introduce an ICC Article 16 deferral at UNSC that could garner a Western veto. End summary.

CLEANING UP NAFIE'S MESS

[1](#)2. (C) On September 19, Sudanese VP Ali Osman Taha traveled to North Darfur's capital of El Fasher to try to arrive at an agreement with disgruntled Darfur rebel leader Minni Minnawi. Minnawi, ostensibly Sudan's number four official as "Senior Assistant to the President" has grown increasingly unhappy about lack of Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) implementation and in May 2008, returned to the field with his remaining fighters. Disgruntlement escalated into outright fighting between the peace partners (reftels) in the past few weeks with many observers expecting Minnawi's "Sudan Liberation Movement" to go back to war and link up with other rebel groups such as SLA-Unity and JEM.

[1](#)3. (C) Taking advantage of the absence of Presidential Assistant Nafie Ali Nafie (a bitter rival of Taha's), the VP and intelligence chief Salah Ghosh have been feverishly trying to hammer out a deal to woo Minni back before he breaks with Khartoum (reftel a). Minnawi advisor Muhammad al-Tijani told CDA Fernandez on September 17 that the efforts "have as much to do with infighting in the NCP and the ICC crisis" as they do with Minnawi. A reluctant Minni agreed to meet on certain conditions: UNAMID helicopters would transport him and his personal bodyguards from his base in Muzbat to El Fasher while other SLM units entered by ground, and UNAMID and CDA Fernandez were to be present as observers. These were accepted by the NCP (Al-Tijani serving as go-between with Ghosh) late on September 18.

THE EL FASHER MINUET

14. (C) In an impressively choreographed scenario on the morning of September 19, CDA Fernandez, two senior Sudanese newspaper editors and a police general flew by government jet to a heavily militarized El Fasher airport. Already in place were the governors of Darfur's three states, local SLM commanders and political leaders. 4 SAF Mi-24 helicopter gunships and one Antonov bomber, which had reportedly been in action against Minnawi's forces days before remained on the tarmac. Fernandez was then joined by UNAMID Deputy JSR Henry Anyidoho as the two white UNAMID choppers arrived, disgorging 20 heavily armed bodyguards in green battle turbans, bandoleers, and sniper rifles and a smiling Minnawi in safari suit. About 15 minutes later, VP Taha's jet arrived, carrying not only the VP, but NISS Chief Ghosh, MOD General Abdelrahim Hussein, Minister of Interior Ibrahim Mahmoud Ibrahim, Minister of Justice Sabdarat, and MFA U/S Mutriff Siddiq, who handles the UNAMID portfolio for the GOS. A swirling, dusty caravan of landrovers guarded by SLA fighters in their typical cut-off Toyota raiding vehicles, NISS technicals, SAF and police units drove to the Governor's compound for talks.

15. (C) CDA Fernandez accompanied MFA U/S Siddiq who was fuming at what he characterized as "unfair and unreasonable" American pressure on Sudan to speed up UNAMID deployment. He noted that Ghosh had briefed the VP about the suggestion that Sudan allow Egyptian and Ethiopian troops to drive to Darfur to speed up deployment (reftel a). "We are not opposed to that but we are not the hold up, we are doing everything we can, it is the UN's fault, they are not ready to receive the Egyptians and Ethiopians, or the Thais for that matter. We are not blocking anything." Siddiq also was scathing about a letter from the new UN/AU Chief Mediator Djibril Bassoule to

KHARTOUM 00001422 002 OF 003

Dr. Nafie suggesting a variety of political steps Khartoum can take to facilitate political negotiations. The letter, which Mutriff has in his possession to deliver to Nafie upon his return, was "biased" and prejudices the outcome of negotiations, "it could have been written by (rebel leaders) Abdul Wahid Nur or Khalil Ibrahim." CDA Fernandez suggested that the Sudanese take Bassoule's letter, "we are very supportive of his mission," and not dismiss the contents of the letter.

CEASEFIRE A PRIORITY

16. (C) At the Wali's compound, negotiations began in earnest with a meeting between initially quite frosty Minnawi and Taha, later bringing in the government ministers and Minnawi's advisors. Minni's Chief of Staff Muhammad Bashir told CDA "Minni was angry because not only had bombing continued until yesterday, while we were negotiating about whether or not to have this meeting, but SAF even was denying that they were bombing." Taha and Minnawi emerged briefly to tell the media that "we both want to reiterate our commitment to the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA)" and then returned to closed sessions.

17. (C) Halfway during the meetings, Minnawi held a one-on-one meeting with CDA Fernandez. He said that he told Taha that the priority for him was the immediate end to bombing runs and ground attacks against his troops in Eastern Jebel Marra and Diza/Bermaza and the swift return of IDPs driven from those areas. Taha agreed to Minni's demands. It was agreed to form a joint security committee to prevent from such attacks happening again. Minnawi also pressed for non-signatories, such as SLA-Unity, who are already in close contact with Minnawi, to be left alone by SAF. He will try to reconcile them to the DPA. Minnawi noted that some SLA-Unity forces are only 17 kilometers from the center of El Fasher. The GOS officials told him that they fear that the Chadian-supported Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) of Khalil Ibrahim could attack either El Fasher or El-Geneina in West Darfur in the coming weeks.

18. (C) Minni added that Taha and company had pressed him on integrating his forces into the army and police but had countered that "security arrangements cannot be divorced from the rest of the DPA" and in any case, right now in Darfur, powerful militia leaders such as the Janjaweed commander "Hamati," the three Darfur governors, and even local mayors and umdas have their private forces, "we are not fools. We will never integrate our forces as long as others are out there." Minnawi added that he had confronted an unusually subdued Defense Minister Hussein who had still insisted that his forces had not attacked Minni's units in the past weeks. "I told him, come with me to the field and I will show you their i.d. cards, and their bodies." He said that the attackers had been SAF and the Abu Terra unit of Janjaweed belonging to the Ministry of Interior.

19. (C) Minnawi said that if the joint committees looking at our suggestions reaches a positive result, I will return to Khartoum. CDA suggested that he might want to see if some of the decisions are actually implemented before returning and Minnawi heartily agreed to return to Muzbat and await developments. He could be back in Khartoum within a week. Minni was scathing about both the performance and attitude of UNAMID, "they care only about their next meal." He was concerned that the problem wasn't just numbers and equipment, but attitude as the peacekeepers have developed a cozy symbiotic relationship with the Khartoum authorities. "They are useless, as was quite clear during the fighting over the past two weeks." He also voiced concern about Chinese companies drilling in deep North Darfur and asked if there was any way the Americans could find out what they are up to. Asked about his expectations of this latest agreement, Minnawi said "they won't implement it. Even if Taha is sincere, they are broken up into feuding camps now." Minni laughed, "and we wouldn't be here with them if we hadn't defeated them badly in the past week."

SEQUENCING IS KEY

10. (C) After a few more hours of negotiating, both sides agreed that there had been enough progress to declare the

KHARTOUM 00001422 003 OF 003

meeting a success. Before the press conference announcing it, VP Taha asked to see CDA Fernandez, Deputy JSR Anyidoho, and UNAMID Force Commander Gen. Martin Agwei. Taha thanked UNAMID (and CDA) for making the discussions with Minnawi a success. He reiterated Sudan's full commitment to the SOFA, its readiness to overcome all obstacles limiting full deployment, and said that the meeting augured a "new, more intense cooperation between the GOS and UNAMID." CDA then had a chance to talk privately with Taha. CDA noted that both the VP's words to UNAMID and agreement with Minnawi were heartening but the United States wanted to see more, "a tangible improvement of the situation on the ground." One way to do that was to see actual UNAMID boots on the ground increase. Sudan can be helpful in making this happen. CDA warned Taha about Sudan moving too quickly, through its proxies on the Security Council, to introduce an Article 16 ICC deferral, such an effort will be vetoed if this happens in the next days and weeks, "sequencing is everything. The U.S. is flexible and open-minded but is looking for tangible results on the ground, not just agreements."

11. (C) At the press event, the two sides confirmed their commitment to full DPA implementation, established a joint implementation and a joint security/military committee, agreed to energize the TDRA and reconstruction fund, to put the DPA into the Interim National Constitution, to work together to secure roads for food convoys and to protect IDPs. Taha added that the agreement represents a new stage of cooperation between the two sides in all aspects - political,

security and economic. This can encourage other rebel groups to join the peace process and also harmonizes with the All-Party "Ahl Sudan" (People of Sudan) Initiative launched by President Al-Bashir. Al-Tijani and Muhammad Bashir sought out CDA in the rush after the press event, "for now, we are very satisfied but don't take your eye off of them."

¶12. (C) Comment: The marathon discussion solved - at least temporarily - one problem of the NCP's own making: the marginalization of their sole Darfur peace partner and the end of the regime's most recent effort to militarily "pacify" Darfur. It must also be seen within the context of the rivalry between Nafie and Taha (Nafie was the single biggest cause of Minnawi's alienation) and as such consists of successful poaching by Taha on Nafie's turf. It is also, coupled with the abject offer of cooperation with UNAMID, to be seen as building blocks for the VP's trip to UNGA where he will work aggressively to make Sudan's case for ICC deferral at the Security Council. Unfortunately for the regime, both mollifying Minni and helping UNAMID are steps that the regime promised to do, and could have taken, long ago. It is only the fear of an ICC arrest warrant that is prompting this welcome if overdue action. These are not bold new steps but, at best, the fulfillment of past commitments. Certainly the international community needs to take up the regime on its offer to be helpful to UNAMID while pressing DPKO and UNAMID aggressively - Siddiq is right about the UN's own complicity in the glacially slow deployment. As for Minnawi, despite his close relationship with the US Embassy and support from the USG, he is only one player in an increasingly fractious political and military scene in Darfur. Like other Zaghawa leaders, Minnawi's prowess in raiding and on the battlefield, is only exceeded by the general dislike and fear in which he is held by many of Darfur's other communities, both African and Arab. And Minnawi's wolfish and ill-paid fighters are just one of many contributors to a general rise in instability and anarchy throughout Darfur that seems to be outside of anyone's firm control. But ironically, despite over two years of dogged effort in undermining him, the NCP suddenly needs Minnawi to show progress, not matter how illusory or transitory, on the Darfur political front as his former colleagues and rivals - Khalil Ibrahim, Abdul Wahid Nur - ponder their next moves and wait to see if the ICC can deal the regime a major blow. End comment.

FERNANDEZ